UN Tourism

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Supplementary agenda item 3

Proposal by UAE: Inter-Institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation

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Executive Summary

On 16 November, the United Arab Emirates sent to the UN Tourism Secretariat a proposal for the establishment of an Inter-Institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation.

Note by the Secretariat

After consultation between the Chair of the Council and the Secretariat, and for efficiency reasons, it was agreed to propose that the Council mandate the Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness to study the proposal by the United Arab Emirates, as reflected in the draft decision.

UN Tourism

DRAFT DECISION[1]

Supplementary agenda item 3
Proposal by UAE: Inter-Institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation
(documents CE/127/Supp/3 and CE/127/1 prov. suppl.)

The Executive Council,

Having taken cognizance of the Proposal for an Inter-Institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation submitted by the United Arab Emirates,

Recalling the Joint Statement on Aviation and Tourism of 2013, the Medellín Statement of 2015, the Sal Ministerial Declaration of 2019, the Memorandum of Understanding between the World Tourism Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization of 2021 and the Luanda Ministerial Statement of 2025,

Recalling also the International Code for the Protection of Tourists, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 732(XXIV),

Welcoming the negotiation of a new Memorandum of Understanding and joint action plan between UN Tourism and the International Civil Aviation Organization,

Noting the disruption to international air transport and tourism in 2026,

1. *Takes note* of the proposal to establish an Inter-institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation;

2. *Mandates* the Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness to study the proposal by the United Arab Emirates, and to invite the International Civil Aviation Organization to share its views on the proposal and on the form of any participation, without prejudice to its mandate under the Convention on International Civil Aviation;

3. *Invites* Members to submit comments on the proposal to the Secretariat within three months of the present session; and

4. *Requests* the Committee on Tourism and Competitiveness to submit to the Council at its next session a report on the technical, administrative and financial implications of the proposal, together with draft terms of reference that include measurable objectives, indicators and targets.

[1] This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Executive Council, please refer to the Decisions document issued at the end of the session.

Executive Council
127th session
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
23–25 November 2026

Proposal for an Inter-institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation

Proposal submitted by the United Arab Emirates

Executive summary

The United Arab Emirates proposes a time-limited Inter-institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation, to serve as a Member-driven mechanism for implementing cooperation between UN Tourism and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), including the new Memorandum of Understanding and joint action plan expected to be concluded in 2026.

Since 2013, UN Tourism and ICAO have repeatedly committed to joint action on air connectivity, travel facilitation, tourist protection and crisis response. None of these commitments was accompanied by a follow-up mechanism, measurable targets or dedicated resources. The working group would address this gap through five measurable objectives to 2029, at no cost to the regular budget of the Organization.

At its 127th session, the Council is invited only to take note of the proposal and to request the Secretary-General to report on its implications. A decision on establishment would be considered at the Council's next session.

Action to be taken by the Council: the Council is invited to adopt the draft decision set out below.

DRAFT DECISION

Proposal for an Inter-institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation

(document CE/127/[x])

The Executive Council,

Recalling the Joint Statement on Aviation and Tourism of 2013, the Medellín Statement of 2015, the Sal Ministerial Declaration of 2019, the Memorandum of Understanding between the World Tourism Organization and the International Civil Aviation Organization of 2021 and the Luanda Ministerial Statement of 2025,

Recalling also the International Code for the Protection of Tourists, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 732(XXIV),

Welcoming the negotiation of a new Memorandum of Understanding and joint action plan between UN Tourism and the International Civil Aviation Organization,

Noting the disruption to international air transport and tourism in 2026,

Having examined the proposal submitted by the United Arab Emirates,

1. *Takes note* of the proposal to establish an Inter-institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation;

2. *Requests* the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Chair of the Council and the Secretariat of the International Civil Aviation Organization, to submit to the Council at its next session a report on the technical, administrative and financial implications of the proposal, together with draft terms of reference that include measurable objectives, indicators and targets;

3. *Invites* Members to submit comments on the proposal to the Secretariat within three months of the present session;

4. *Invites* the International Civil Aviation Organization to share its views on the proposal and on the form of any participation, without prejudice to its mandate under the Convention on International Civil Aviation; and

This is a draft decision. For the final decision adopted by the Council, please refer to the Decisions document issued at the end of the session.

I. Introduction

1. The United Arab Emirates submits this proposal for the consideration of the Executive Council at its 127th session. It invites the Council to take note of a proposal for a time-limited Inter-institutional Working Group on Tourism and Aviation and to request the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Secretariat of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), to report at the Council's next session on the technical, administrative and financial implications of the proposal, together with draft terms of reference.

2. Should the Council decide to establish it, the working group would be a subsidiary organ of the Executive Council under Article 19(f) of the Statutes, modelled on the Inter-institutional Working Group on Tourism and Climate Action approved by the Council in May 2025 (CE/DEC/12(CXXIII)). It would be financed entirely through voluntary contributions, at no cost to the regular budget of the Organization.

3. The proposal builds on the commitment of the United Arab Emirates to the protection of tourists, reflected in its adherence to the International Code for the Protection of Tourists in June 2024, and on the close link between air transport and tourism in world economies.

II. A record of joint commitments

4. UN Tourism and ICAO have cooperated under a Working Arrangement since 1978 and a Memorandum of Co-operation since 2010. Since 2013, the two Organizations have signed, convened or adopted eight joint texts, listed in the Annex. These texts return repeatedly to the same commitments:

   (a) air connectivity for remote, landlocked and island destinations, including essential service and tourism development routes;

   (b) visa facilitation and the use of digital travel processes;

   (c) the alignment of passenger and tourist protection;

   (d) the sharing of data and statistics; and

   (e) coordinated response to crises affecting travel.

5. The Ministerial Declaration of Sal (2019) and the Ministerial Statement of Luanda (2025) were co-convened by UN Tourism and ICAO and adopted by African ministers. Their follow-up therefore concerns those Members, ICAO and the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) as much as UN Tourism.

6. The Council at its 126th session was informed that a new Memorandum of Understanding and joint action plan with ICAO were under negotiation and expected to be signed in 2026 (CE/126/4 rev.1, paragraph 22). The proposed working group would complement this framework by giving Members a defined role in its delivery.

III. Why past commitments were not sustained

7. A review of the published texts shows that none of them established a mechanism to carry its commitments forward. Implementation therefore depended on the goodwill of the two Secretariats and was revived mainly in times of crisis. Six causes recur, and the proposal is designed to address each of them:

Cause	What the record shows	How the working group would address it
No owner	No text named a body responsible for follow-up	A subsidiary organ of the Council with officers and a work programme
No targets or reporting	No text set indicators, deadlines or reporting dates	Five objectives with baselines and 2028–2029 targets; an annual report to the Council

Cause	What the record shows	How the working group would address it
Adoption outside governing bodies	Texts were signed by Secretaries-General or adopted at ministerial conferences, not by the governing bodies of either Organization	Reporting through the Executive Council; Members to bring relevant outputs to the attention of ICAO's own bodies
Divided responsibility	Tourism and civil aviation fall under different ministries and Organizations	Paired tourism and civil aviation focal points in each participating Member; ICAO to take part in the form it decides
No resources	None of the texts reviewed allocated staff or funding	A dedicated multi-donor voluntary fund
Crisis-driven cooperation	Joint arrangements were created after crises began, notably in 2020–2021	A standing group, with established contacts between tourism and civil aviation authorities, in place before the next disruption

8. This assessment is based on the published texts. The Secretariats may hold records of implementation that the Secretary-General's report could take into account.

IV. Why now

9. The events of 2026 demonstrated how closely tourism depends on air transport. The International Air Transport Association reported that the international traffic of Middle East carriers fell by 60.8% year on year in March 2026. According to the World Tourism Barometer (September 2026), international arrivals grew by only 0.4% in the first half of 2026, arrivals in the Middle East fell by 22%, and the forecast for 2026 was revised from growth of 3–4% to 1–2%.

10. The expected conclusion of a new Memorandum of Understanding and joint action plan gives the two Secretariats a renewed framework for cooperation. Establishing the working group in 2027, the International Year of Sustainable and Resilient Tourism, would give Members a role in delivering it from the outset.

V. The proposed working group

11. **Mandate.** The working group would serve as a Member-driven mechanism for implementing the joint commitments of UN Tourism and ICAO on the tourism dimension of air transport, including under the new Memorandum of Understanding and joint action plan, and would advise the Executive Council accordingly. It would act without prejudice to the mandate of ICAO under the Convention on International Civil Aviation, and would not address air services negotiations, aviation standards or emissions policy.

12. **Duration.** The working group would operate until the 28th session of the General Assembly (2029), when Members would review its results and decide whether to close it, extend it or convert it into a committee.

13. **Membership and officers.** Participation would be open to all Full Members on a rolling basis. The working group would elect a Chair and two Vice-Chairs from three different regions for two years. The United Arab Emirates would not seek either office during the first term.

14. **Participation of ICAO and observers.** ICAO would be invited to participate in a form to be determined by ICAO. Associate and Affiliate Members, organizations of the United Nations system, AFCAC and other regional civil aviation bodies would participate as observers; the International Air Transport Association, Airports Council International and the World Travel & Tourism Council could be invited.

15. **Climate.** The working group would not establish a separate climate track. Climate-related matters would be considered in joint sessions with the Inter-institutional Working Group on

Tourism and Climate Action, without prejudice to the mandate of ICAO or to national and regional measures.

16. **Reporting.** The working group would report annually to the Executive Council against its objectives, and the Council would report to the General Assembly.

VI. Objectives and measurable outcomes

17. The working group would be assessed against five objectives, each with an indicator, a baseline and a target date. The 2029 review would use these results to decide whether the working group should continue. The targets below are proposed for consultation and would be finalized in the terms of reference.

Objective	Indicator	Baseline	Target
1. Track and deliver past commitments	Share of joint commitments (2013–2026) with an assigned owner and a reported status	No tracker exists	Tracker adopted at the first meeting; status of all commitments reported to the Council annually from 2028
2. Improve connectivity for remote and underserved destinations	Tourism–Air Connectivity Index; destinations applying an essential-routes toolkit	No index; no destinations	Index covering LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS published, with its method, by end-2028; toolkit applied in at least 5 destinations in 3 regions by 2029
3. Advance visa facilitation and tourist protection	Joint facilitation guidance issued; States adhering to the International Code for the Protection of Tourists	No joint guidance; 32 adhering States (November 2025)	Guidance issued by end-2028; at least 40 adhering States by the 28th General Assembly (2029)
4. Build shared evidence	Annual Tourism and Air Connectivity Outlook	None	First edition by mid-2028; second edition by mid-2029
5. Inform the work of ICAO	Working or information papers submitted by Members to ICAO bodies on the working group's outputs	None	At least two by 2029

VII. Financial implications

18. The working group would entail no cost to the regular budget of the Organization. It would be financed through voluntary contributions to a single multi-donor arrangement administered under the Financial Regulations and Rules of UN Tourism. After the first year, no single donor would provide more than 40% of its funding.

VIII. Way forward

20. The United Arab Emirates proposes the following sequence:

    (a) *127th session of the Executive Council (November 2026):* the Council takes note of the proposal and requests the Secretary-General's report;

    (b) *Next session of the Executive Council (2027):* the Council considers the report and decides on establishment and terms of reference;

    (c) *Second half of 2027:* first meeting of the working group, election of officers and adoption of its work programme; and

    (d) *28th session of the General Assembly (2029):* review of results against the objectives and decision on the future of the working group.

21. The United Arab Emirates looks forward to working with all Members, the Secretariat and ICAO on this proposal, and welcomes comments from Members.

Annex: Joint texts of UN Tourism and ICAO since 2013

Year	Joint text	Follow-up mechanism set out
2013	Joint Statement on Aviation and Tourism, Montréal, signed by both Secretaries-General	None beyond the 1978 Working Arrangement and the 2010 Memorandum of Co-operation
2015	Medellín Statement, first joint UNWTO/ICAO High-Level Forum	None
2019	Ministerial Declaration on Air Transport and Tourism Development in Africa, Sal, Cabo Verde	None
2020	Participation of ICAO in the UN Tourism Global Tourism Crisis Committee	Ad hoc, established after the pandemic began
2021	Memorandum of Understanding between UNWTO and ICAO	No programme, deliverables or reporting line
2021	International Code for the Protection of Tourists, resolution 732(XXIV)	Monitoring committee within UN Tourism; no link to ICAO
2025	Luanda Ministerial Statement, Second UN Tourism–ICAO Ministerial Conference on Tourism and Air Transport in Africa	None named
2026 (expected)	New Memorandum of Understanding and joint action plan (CE/126/4 rev.1, para. 22)	Joint action plan between the Secretariats; no defined role for Members